

NEWS RELEASES

0633

(No. 32 April 2006)

News is a report of recent events; old news is history. As a test for news value, a news release should meet all or most of the following criteria:

Timely—An event that has just happened or is about to happen

Proximity—Relates to the community served by the media

Prominence—Involves well-known people or places

Consequences—Involves something of importance to audience (e.g., loss of resources by fire)

Human Interest—Includes an element that attracts readers. These might be:

- Rescues
- New department programs
- Camp crew projects
- Law enforcement (limited due to security issues)
- Non-traditional roles

A complete news release should include the five W's: who, what, where, when, why, and if possible, how, all in the first paragraph so the reader will quickly understand what the event, issue, or general information is. The first sentence should be as interesting as possible to make the reader want to continue, and should be concise and no more than 25 words. Ideally, distribute the release several days in advance of an event.

When distributing a news release, be sure to e-mail a copy to the CAL FIRE Communications Office in Sacramento. See below for CAL FIRE News Release Standards and see [Exhibits](#) for format samples.

News Release Review and Distribution Policy

Some news releases need to be approved through the CAL FIRE Communications Office **prior** to distribution. This does not include the standard news releases that are repeated routinely (burning permits, public safety warnings, etc.). If you are uncomfortable or unsure about a sensitive subject that will be included in a news release (budget, staffing, local government funding issues, personnel matters -- hiring and firing -- fatalities) you should email the Deputy Director of Communications as soon as possible and follow up with a phone call to ensure that the release has been received. The Communications office will advise the field on any other significant issues requiring pre-approval as they occur. The Communications office will review your release, advise you on edits and approve the release for distribution.

News Release Forms

All units, area and region offices will use only the news release forms produced by the Communications Office in Sacramento. (See [Exhibits](#) for sample forms.) These forms have a basic news release letterhead and the Department logo; they have been adapted to include the unit/region name as well as the logo and name of your county fire department where applicable. The forms are produced in Word format. Please contact the Communications Office or refer to the Published Information section of the CAL FIRE Intranet.

CAL FIRE Style Guidelines for News Releases

All news releases will adhere to the CAL FIRE Style Guidelines available on the CAL FIRE Intranet in the Published Information section. The CAL FIRE Style Guidelines are a tool for good writing and proper “news” writing format.

News Release Standards for CAL FIRE

1. The CAL FIRE News Release Forms will be used for all CAL FIRE News Releases. Masters of CAL FIRE News Release forms for your particular unit or region are available on the CAL FIRE Intranet.
2. A contact person (name and title) must be included as well as their complete phone number.
3. Keep the news release to no more than one page in length whenever possible.
4. Type “-MORE-“ at the bottom of a page when there is another page to follow.
5. Do not type a release in ALL CAPS. This appears as if you did not want to take the time to determine what should or shouldn't be capitalized.
6. Use 1.5 or double line spacing on all releases. This will keep the appearance neat.
7. Date all releases. Do not put “FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE”. By dating the release, an editor will know when it was released.
8. Type “ # # # “ at the bottom of the final page of the release, this will let the reader know that there are no more pages.

9. Use a DATELINE at the start of the first paragraph. Type the location from which the release is originating (SAN ANDREAS, SANTA ROSA, CAMINO, WILLITS, etc.) This shows a clear scope of authority. Make it clear that the release is from a unit or region, and not CAL FIRE in general.
10. Spell Check!!! At least two people should proofread every release before it goes out!!!
11. When announcing an event, attach a map or directions whenever appropriate.
12. Update your media contacts and mailing lists regularly to ensure releases will be sent to the correct people.

MEDIA PACKETS

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For important events media packets aid reporters and create a professional image for the department.

Media packets, or press kits, are folders containing information and visuals. A media packet should contain easily retrievable facts, not volumes of wordy paragraphs. For example, rather than writing a report on the steady increase of fires, a bar graph tells the story at a glance, a pie chart displays causes, and a bullet point format makes the supporting information much easier to follow.

For a polished look, arrange the pages in various sizes, if time or money allows, but concentrate on content. The packet should include enough background information for a complete story and include the name and phone number of a contact person. If the packet is part of an event, the agenda should include the names and titles of all speakers and participants to help the reporter. Make sure all names and titles are spelled correctly.

Media kits can include other helpful items such as:

- Fact sheets or brochures related to the event, statistical information, SRA maps, fire hazard maps, other supporting handouts, or general information about the department.
- Fire safety and prevention materials (if appropriate).
- Map and written directions to the event

EXCLUSIVE STORIES

0633.2

(May 1997)

Occasionally, a reporter develops a story that his or her competitors do not have. This is called an exclusive. Information officers should never tell a competing news agency about one of these stories, but if a competitor should find out, an information officer must answer that reporter's questions honestly.

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[\(see Forms or Forms Samples\)](#)